Chapter 3
Multi-Family Residential

A. Introduction

Multi-family developments are characterized by higher density residential buildings comprised of attached units and common facilities such as parking, open space and recreation areas. Multi-unit structures, if not properly designed can dominate their surroundings, parking and circulation areas can dominate the site and open space may be relegated to undevelopable left over areas.

This chapter provides guidelines which are applicable to attached multi-family developments regardless of their type of ownership including apartments, condominiums and townhomes. The guidelines apply to smaller infill as well as larger master planned projects and encourage the highest level of design quality while allowing maximum flexibility in the design of multi-family residential developments.

Multi-family building cluster

Site specific standards and guidelines for Planned Unit Developments and Specific Plan areas shall take precedence when in conflict with the following guidelines. Where site specific standards or guidelines are silent, these guidelines will serve as a supplement

B. General Design Objectives

Multi-family residential development in Huntington Beach should:

- Contribute to the sense of community by respecting the scale, proportion and character of the surrounding area
- Mitigate existing adverse automobile oriented planning patterns by providing pedestrian friendly design solutions
- Establish attractive, imaginative and functional site arrangements of buildings, open space, recreation areas and parking areas, and a high quality architectural and landscape design
- Create visual interest and individual unit identity, while maintaining a sense of harmony and human scale building proportions along street frontages and other portions of the project exposed to public view
- Provide adequate open space, parking and privacy
- Preserve and incorporate natural amenities unique to the site such as ocean views, and mature trees into the project development proposal
- Preserve and incorporate structures which are distinctive because of their age, cultural significance, or unique architectural style into the project development proposal

C. Site Planning

1. Grading

a. Multi-family development should be sensitive to its natural surroundings. Grading should be minimized by following the natural contours to the greatest extent possible. Graded slopes should be rounded and contoured to blend with the existing terrain.

b. Grading should emphasize and accentuate scenic vistas and natural landforms.

c. Large manufactured slopes should be avoided in favor of several smaller slopes integrated throughout the project. Smaller slopes are less obtrusive, more easily vegetated and can be used to add visual interest, preserve views and provide visual buffers where necessary

d. Significant natural vegetation should be retained and incorporated into the project.

2. Compatibility

a. The arrangement of structures, circulation and open spaces should recognize the particular characteristics of the site and should relate to the surrounding built environment in pattern, function scale, character and materials. In developed areas, new projects should meet or exceed the standards of quality which have been set by surrounding development.

b. Structures which are distinctive due to their age, cultural significance, or unique architectural style should be preserved and incorporated in the project development proposal.

c. Residential uses should be buffered from incompatible development. Intensified landscaping, increased setbacks and appropriate building orientation should be utilized as a means of providing adequate separation between such land uses.

3. Site Entry and Edge Design

a. Multi-family developments in Huntington Beach should be distinguished by entry and edge design features such as ornamental landscaping, open space areas, natural features, architectural monumentation and enhanced paving.

Use of enhanced paving and ornamental landscaping at project entrance

b. Courtyard doors or gates should be designed as an important, well integrated architectural feature of the building or complex.

4. Building Siting

a. Buildings should be generally oriented parallel to streets with varying setbacks to provide visual interest and varying shadow patterns.

b. Clustering of multi-family units should be a consistent site-planning element. Large projects should be broken up into groups of structures. Including building elements of various heights within the overall building design is encouraged.

c. Buildings should be oriented to promote privacy to the greatest extent possible.

d. Site buildings to create courtyards and open space areas.

5. Vehicular Access/ Circulation/ Parking

a. Site access and internal circulation should promote safety, efficiency, and convenience. Conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians should be avoided. Continuous circulation should be provided throughout the site to the greatest extend possible. Dead-end driveways should be minimized. Adequate areas for maneuvering, stacking, and emergency vehicle access should be provided.

b. The number of site access points should be minimized and located as far as possible from street intersections.

c. Principal vehicular access into multifamily projects should be through an entry drive rather than a parking aisle.

d. Parking courts should be separated from buildings by a raised walkway (minimum 4 feet wide) and landscape strip (minimum 7 feet wide).

e. Parking courts should be treated as an important space whose character is clearly defined by landscaping, lighting, building massing, and pedestrian/ vehicular circulation areas.

f. Large multi-family parking areas should be divided into a series of connected smaller parking courts.

g. Adverse visual impacts from parking areas, carports, and garage doors on the residential character of the street or project site should be

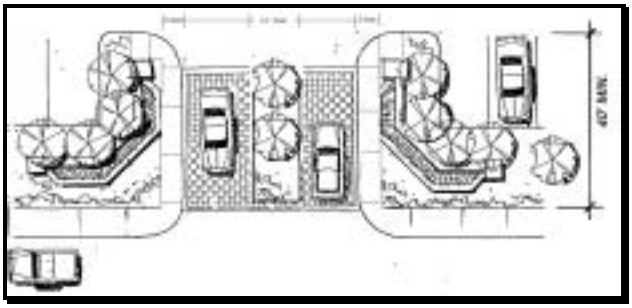
minimized through proper siting and design.

Carport design and siting should minimize adverse visual impacts

h. Driveway entry locations should be coordinated with existing or planned median openings and driveways on the opposite side of the roadway.

6. Pedestrian Circulation

a. Facilitate pedestrian access and circulation. Entry design should incorporate sidewalks on both sides of the driveway.



Facilitate pedestrian access at project entries

b. Where possible, multi-family projects should incorporate pedestrian connections to adjoining residential, commercial projects, and other compatible land use facilities.

c. Pedestrian walkways should be provided to link dwelling units with common open space areas, recreation areas, parking courts and the street. Curvilinear paths provide a more inviting and interesting experience and are generally preferred over long, straight alignments. Paths which traverse open space areas are encouraged.

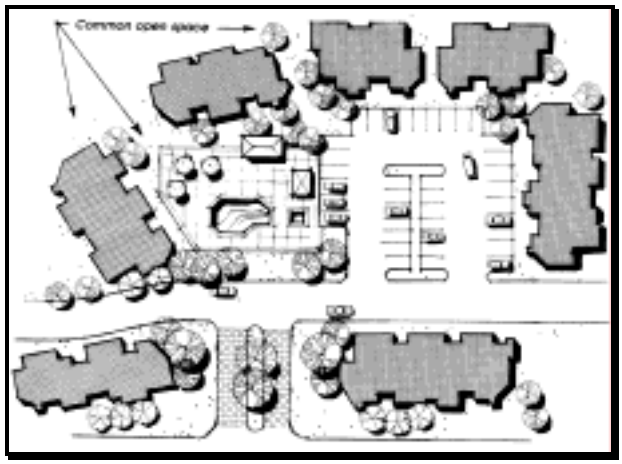
d. Pedestrian walkways should be at a minimum (4) ft. in clear width.

e. Pedestrian walkways should be safe, visually attractive, and well defined by landscaping and lights. Use of decorative pavement is encouraged. At a minimum, decorative paving should be used to delineate crossings at circulation drives and parking aisles.

7. Open Space

a. The design and orientation of open space areas should provide shelter from the noise and traffic of adjacent streets or other incompatible uses.

b. Open space areas should be designed to take advantage of prevailing breezes and sunlight.



Orient buildings to create useable open space

c. Open space areas should be provided in large meaningful areas, not unusable fragments.

d. Common open space area(s) should be sited to maximize their accessibility and use by residents.

e. Private open spaces should be contiguous to the units they serve and screened from public view.

f. Children's play areas should be sited to be visible from residential units.

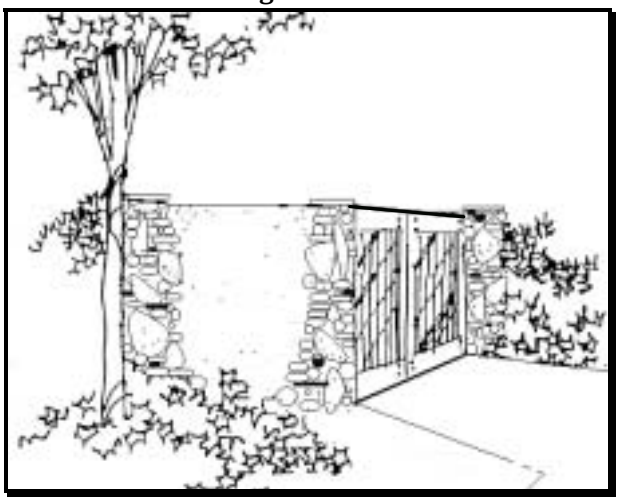
Provide children play areas visible from units

8. Utility and Mechanical Equipment

a. Utility and mechanical equipment (e.g. electric and gas meters, electrical panels, transformers and junction boxes) should be screened from view. All screening devices should be compatible with the architecture, materials and colors of adjacent structures.

b. Transformers shall not dominate the streetscape. When transformers are required to be installed adjacent to the street, they should be undergrounded.

9. Refuse and Storage Areas



a. Trash and storage enclosures should be architecturally compatible with the project design. Landscaping shall be incorporated into their design to screen them and deter graffiti.

b. Trash enclosures should be unobtrusive and conveniently accessible for trash collection but should not impede circulation during loading operations.

10. Walls and Fences

a. Walls and fences should be enhanced and constructed with materials such as masonry, metal, wood or a combination thereof. Tiered planting should be provided adjacent to project or community perimeter walls along street frontages to soften their appearance.

b. Project or community perimeter walls should be of masonry construction or ornamental metal (view fencing) and sited to accommodate a minimum fifteen (15) ft. landscaped setback.

c. Wall sections greater than 50 ft. in length should incorporate at least two of the following design features, in proportion to the length of the wall:

- A minimum 2-ft. change in plane for at least 10 ft.
- A minimum 18-inch high raised planter for at least 10 ft.
- A minimum 18-inch change in height for at least 10 ft.
- Use of pilasters at 50 ft. maximum intervals and at changes in wall planes
- A minimum 4-ft. high view fencing section for at least 10 ft.

Enhanced community perimeter wall

d. Gates or comparable design solutions should be provided in community perimeter walls or fences to allow emergency access and facilitate convenient pedestrian access to activity areas and adjacent uses.

e. Walls should be eliminated or sited to provide additional setback areas at project entries to accommodate landscaping, ornamental gateways, signage and street furniture.

f. Walls should be curved or angled at corner locations along street frontages.

11. Paving

a. Decorative paving should be incorporated into project site planning design; driveway entries, pedestrian walkways and crosswalks.

Use decorative paving at project entries

b. Paving materials should complement the architectural design. The use of stamped concrete, stone, brick, pavers, exposed aggregate or color concrete is encouraged.

12. Lighting

a. The type and location of site and building lighting should preclude direct glare onto adjoining property, streets, or skyward.

b. Pedestrian scale/decorative light fixtures are encouraged. “High mast” poles are discouraged.

c. Open spaces should be adequately lighted with durable low maintenance fixtures.

Architectural Guidelines

1. Architectural Imagery

a. There is no particular architectural "style" requirement for multi-family residential structures in Huntington Beach. The primary focus should be on developing a high quality residential environment.

b. A visual balance or rhythm should be created by the dimensional ratio of multi-family buildings, their parts and spaces around them.

c. Architectural elements such as bays, bay windows, recessed or projecting balconies, verandahs, balconies, porches and other elements that add visual interest, scale and character to the neighborhood are encouraged.

d. All support buildings (i.e., laundry facilities, recreation buildings and sales/lease offices) should be architecturally compatible with the main building design.

2. Building Façade and Roof Articulation

a. Building heights should be varied and building facades should provide wall offsets to give the appearance of a collection of smaller structures and reduce the perceived height and massing of multi-story structures.

b. Boxy and monotonous building facades that lack human scale proportions and large expanses of flat wall planes are strongly discouraged.

Multiple wall and roof planes are encouraged

c. The maximum number of attached units per building should be 8. Variations to the number and mix of units per structure are encouraged.

d. Buildings containing 3 or more attached dwellings in a row should incorporate at least one of the following:

- For each dwelling unit, at least one architectural projection not less than 2-feet from the wall plane and not less than 8-feet wide should be provided. Projections should extend the full height of single story buildings, at least one-half the height of the two-story building, and two-thirds the height of a three-story building; or
- A change in wall plane of at least 3-feet for at least 12-feet for each two units.

e. In some cases, it may be desirable to "step back" the upper stories of new multi-family buildings to "scale down" facades that face the street, common space, and adjacent residential structures.

f. Distinctive architectural elements, materials and colors should be used to denote primary building entries or individual unit entries.

g. Long monotonous access balconies and corridors should be avoided.

h. Roof-lines should be segmented and varied within an overall horizontal context. Varying heights are encouraged.

i. Combinations of one, one and a half, and two story units create variation and visual interest, and are encouraged.

j. Use of vertical elements such as towers may be used to accent horizontal massing and provide visual interest.

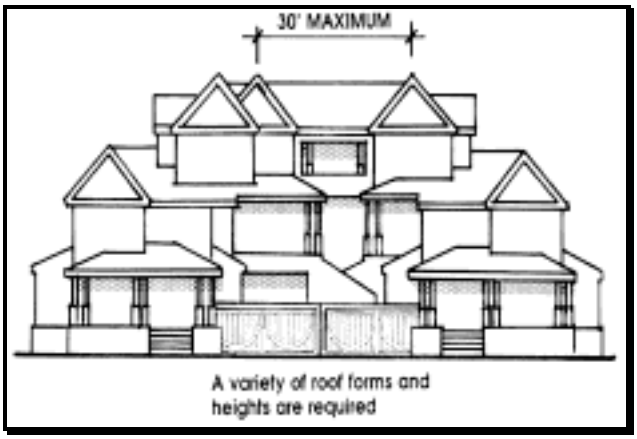
k. Hipped or gabled roofs covering the entire building are preferable to mansard roofs and segments of pitched roofs applied at the building's edge.

l. Roofs should reflect a residential appearance through pitch and use of materials.

m. The roof pitch for a porch may be slightly lower than that of the main building.

n. Carport roofs visible from buildings or streets should incorporate roof slope and materials to match adjacent buildings. Flat carport roofs are discouraged.

o. Awnings, moldings, pilasters and comparable architectural embellishments are encouraged. Verandahs and other types of covered outdoor areas should be used to provide human scale proportions to the building façade.



Create interesting roof lines

p. Ancillary structures such as carports, detached garages, recreational buildings and storage structures should be designed as an integral part of the project architecture. Accessory and service structures should be similar in material, color, and detail to the primary buildings.

q. Open stairways should incorporate solid wall portions, columns and/or a decorative balustrade. Prefabricated metal stairs are strongly discouraged.

Appropriate design of stairway

r. All mechanical equipment whether mounted on the roof or ground shall be screened from view. Utility meters, backflow devices and equipment should be placed in locations that are not exposed to view from the street or they should be suitably screened. All screening devices should be compatible with the architecture and color of the main building(s).

Provide a variety of forms/shapes, setbacks, and roof pitches with offsets

3. Fenestration

a. Where possible, fenestration, should be coordinated vertically and horizontally and windows, doors and other building openings should be designed to be consistent in terms of style.

4. Garage Design

a. Site and design garages to minimize adverse visual impacts to the street scene and project site. Multiple panel door designs, windows or other architectural detailing should be used on garage doors to reduce their impact and scale.

Site garages to minimize visibility from street frontages

5. Building Materials and Colors

a. Building materials should be durable, require low maintenance, and relate a sense of quality and permanence.

b. The building and its elements should be unified by textures, colors and materials. Materials should be consistently applied and should be chosen to work harmoniously with adjacent materials. Piecemeal embellishment and frequent changes in materials should be avoided.

c. Exterior columns for trellises, porches or colonnades should utilize materials and colors, which are compatible with the adjacent building.

d. Materials tend to appear substantial and integral to the structure when material changes occur at changes in plane. Material changes not accompanied by changes in plane appear "tacked-on" and are strongly discouraged.

e. Exterior materials and architectural details should compliment each other and should be stylistically consistent.

f. Exposed gutters and downspouts should be colored to match fascia or wall materials, unless designed as an outstanding architectural feature of the overall theme.

g. Materials such as brick, stone, copper, etc. should be left in their natural colors.

E. Landscaping Guidelines

1. Standard Guidelines

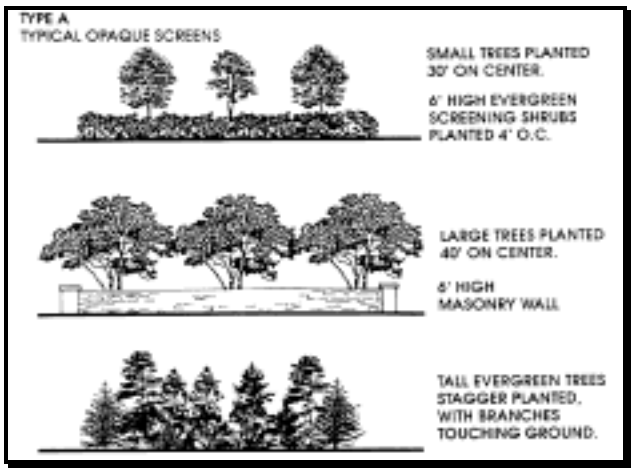
a. Landscaping for multi-family projects should be used to define and accent specific areas (e.g. building entrances, parking lots), define the edges of various land uses, buffer neighboring properties, and screen parking and storage areas.

b. Landscaping should be used as a unifying element within a project to obtain a cohesive appearance and to help achieve compatibility of a new project with its surroundings.

c. Landscaped areas should generally incorporate plantings utilizing a three-tier system; 1) grasses and ground covers, 2) shrubs and vines, and 3) trees.

d. The following planting design concepts are encouraged within each project:

- Specimen trees (36-inch box or more) in informal groupings or rows at major focal points
- Use of flowering vines both on walls and arbors or trellises
- Use of planting to create shadow and patterns against walls
- Use of planting to soften building lines and emphasize the positive features of the site
- Trees to create canopy and shade, especially in parking areas and passive open space areas
- Berms, plantings, and walls to screen parking lots, trash enclosures, storage areas, utility boxes, etc.



Use groundcover, shrubs and trees

e. Landscaping around the building perimeter is encouraged.

f. Landscaping should be protected from vehicular and pedestrian encroachment by raised planting surfaces and the use of curbs. Concrete step-off areas shall be provided in landscape planters adjacent to parking spaces.

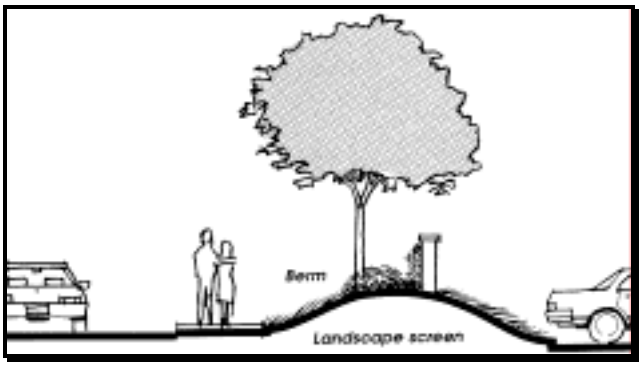
g. Vines and climbing plants integrated upon buildings, trellises, and perimeter walls are encouraged.

h. Gravel or astroturf, is not allowed as a substitute for plant materials.

i. Landscaping shall emphasize water-efficient plants.

j. Plant materials should be placed so that they do not interfere with lighting of the premises or restrict access to emergency apparatus such as fire hydrants or fire alarm boxes. Trees or large shrubs should not be planted under overhead lines or over underground utilities if their growth might interfere with such public utilities.

k. Existing mature, healthy trees should be preserved and incorporated within the overall landscaping plan.



Provide berms to screen parking lots

l. For every 750 square feet of required landscaped area, at least one (1) tree and ten (10) shrubs should be provided.

m. Trees and large shrubs should be placed as follows:

- A minimum of 8 feet between center of trees and edge of driveway, 6 feet from water meter or gas meter and sewer laterals
- A minimum of 25 feet between center of trees and beginning of curb returns at intersections
- A minimum of 15 feet between center of trees and large shrubs to utility poles and street lights
- A minimum of 8 feet between center of trees or large shrubs and fire hydrants, fire department sprinkler, standpipe connections

2. Slope Revegetation and Erosion Control

a. All slopes to be constructed at a gradient steeper than 6:1 horizontal to vertical and with a vertical height of three feet or greater, should be revegetated within 30 days of completion of grading.

b. All slopes should be covered with herbaceous or prostrate shrubby ground covers.

c. All plant materials should be appropriate to the site conditions, water conserving and appropriately spaced to control soil erosion.

d. Trees, shrubs, and ground covers should be planted in undulating massings and groupings to reduce the constricted character of manufactured slopes.

e. Revegetation on permanent slopes should include permanent irrigation systems.

3. Plant Maintenance and Irrigation

a. All young trees should be securely staked with double staking and/or guy-wires. Root barriers shall be required for any tree placed in paved or other locations where roots could damage adjacent paving/curb surfaces.

b. Automatic sprinkler controllers should be installed to ensure that landscaped areas will be watered properly. Backflow preventors and anti-siphon valves should be provided in accordance with current codes.

c. Sprinkler heads and risers should be protected from car bumpers. “Pop-up” heads should be used near curbs and sidewalks.

d. The landscape irrigation system should be designed to prevent run-off and overspray.

e. All irrigation systems should be designed to reduce vandalism by placing controls in appropriate enclosures.

F. Public Safety Through Design

a. Traffic calming features should be integrated into the design of streets. On-street parking, speed tables, gateway treatments, chokers, medians, and chicanes contribute to safety by slowing traffic and make it less attractive to through-traffic.

b. Lighting should be sufficient for sidewalk and street illumination. Pedestrian scale lighting fixtures that provide good levels of lighting are encouraged.

Pedestrian level lighting is encouraged

c. Residential structures should be clustered into smaller "neighborhood" groupings or organized in block patterns.

d. Front porches, back porches and/or decks, which permit casual observation of alleys and streets, are encouraged.

e. Gates should be provided in walls or fences to allow emergency access and promote pedestrian access to activity areas and compatible adjacent uses.

f. Adequate separation should be provided between adjacent land uses and park sites. Siting residential uses adjacent to park sites is discouraged. Where this occurs, view fencing, not solid walls, - should be utilized between the park site and residential properties.

Neighborhood park

g. Locate neighborhood parks so that residential development provides "eyes and ears' on the park.

h. Landscaping should be planted and maintained to allow visibility and eliminate areas of potential criminal activity.

i. Delineate the separation between public and private spaces with paving, building materials, grade separations or with physical barriers such as landscaping.

j. Open spaces, courtyards, circulation corridors, and individual living unit entrances should be designed to be as visible from as many dwelling units as possible.